

**Becky Fast, Executive Director - Written Only**  
**Proponent to House Bill 2206**

House Committee Health and Human Services February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Chair Landwehr and Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 2206. The Kansas Chapter, National Association of Social Workers (KNASW) is the professional association working on behalf of the profession and practice of social work in Kansas. Social workers have been licensed at three levels of practice since 1976. Social Workers practice at the baccalaureate (LBSW), the master (LMSW), and the independent clinical social worker (LSCSW). We are the largest group of mental health providers with over 7000 social workers practicing in the majority of the 105 counties in Kansas. We work in both the public and private sectors of the economy. Social workers serve thousands of Kansans every day.

**NASW-KS Chapter Supports the Work of the Special Committee on Modernization to Address Workforce Shortages Through Expanding Telehealth Options**

A modernized workforce is one where licensed mental health professionals can employ telehealth services to meet the needs of their clients across rural, frontier, and urban areas of the state.

- Kansas Chapter supports expanding the definition of telemedicine in HB 2206 to include "the use of audio only telephonic services in addition to two-way interactive video equipment."
- The inclusion of audio-only telehealth visits will provide more timely access to mental health services for vulnerable seniors who rely on landline phones. Telephonic services are also important service provision for communities that face barriers accessing video technology due to limitations with broadband internet access. The inclusion of audio-only telephonic services would allow Kansans to receive mental health services at home no matter where they live – whether in rural, frontier, or urban communities.

We are supportive of expanding telemedicine options and would like to address this provision for licensed mental health providers.

Section 2. (B). (3) Except when otherwise prohibited by any other provision of law, when the patient consents and the patient has a medical home, as defined in K.S.A. 75-7429, and amendments thereto, a primary care or other treating physician, a care coordinator or other Kansas-based healthcare provider, the healthcare provider providing telemedicine services shall coordinate care to the greatest extent possible with such medical home, primary care or other treating physician, care coordinator or other Kansas-based healthcare provider.

Currently – licensed clinical social workers in their practice act have a higher level of privilege in terms of protecting client confidentiality. Kansas law currently provides confidentiality in a safe space for individuals to share highly personal and private information (i.e. sexual abuse) and not feel threatened that this information will be disclosed to their primary care physician. We believe that patient consent and patient choice to share confidential information is critical to telehealth visits as it is to an inperson visit and must be preserved in this Section.

Kansas Chapter appreciates the work of the Health and Human Services Committee with addressing the importance of telemedicine. The provision of mental health services through telehealth will continue to be a critical service component in order to provide timely access to care for children, families, and seniors even after the pandemic ends in the near future.